

# Ancient Order of Hibernians



THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER DIVISION

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TESTIMONY OFFERED BY THE HELENA ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS

TO THE MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

REGARDING HJR 32—INTERIM STUDY OF STATE PARKS, OUTDOOR RECREATION AND HERITAGE  
RESOURCES—AS IT PERTAINS TO VIRGINIA CITY

MAY 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2012

The Ancient Order of Hibernians—the AOH—is a national fraternal organization with international origins going back to the early and contemporary days of Ireland. Among its purposes are activities to: foster and sustain loyalty to our country and communities; foster the ideals and perpetuate the history and traditions of the Irish people and, to promote Irish culture. The AOH is comprised of active Divisions throughout America. There are 7 AOH Divisions in Montana. The AOH Division in Helena is named the Thomas Francis Meagher Division in honor of Thomas Francis Meagher—the 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary and eventual Territorial Governor of Montana in 1865, and the man memorialized by the bronze statue in front of the Montana State Capitol.

The Helena AOH has an active interest in Virginia City and more specifically, the Meagher Cabin located on Idaho Street in Virginia City. This cabin is presently owned by the State of Montana and managed by the Montana Heritage Commission (MHC). In this regard, the AOH has been visiting Virginia City annually for nearly 15 years in an effort to preserve and maintain the Meagher Cabin site in partnership with the MHC. In the last 3 years, our annual effort has evolved into a weekend event called “Irish Weekend” which includes maintenance of the Meagher Cabin, a parade and two days of Irish Cultural events in collaboration with the MHC, the Virginia City Merchants and Chamber of Commerce and the people in Virginia City. This has been a harmonious and fruitful partnership for all of us. If you want to see how this partnership works, come the “Irish Weekend” in Virginia City this year will be on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.

*Ireland unfree shall never be at Pe*

EQC  
May 3, 2012  
Exhibit 5

Consequently, the AOH has a “stakeholder interest” in what happens to the Meagher Cabin, Virginia City and the Montana Heritage Commission and we are here to represent that interest before you as you consider HJR 32.

The Helena AOH is opposed to any legislative or other administrative effort that would merge or combine the MHC and Virginia City with the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks itself or the Parks Division within that Department. Inasmuch as you recently visited Virginia City, you surely know that Virginia City is not like Lost Creek State Park near Anaconda, Spring Meadow Lake near Helena or the 320 Fishing Access Sites around the State of Montana. Virginia City is a viable Incorporated Town with people and businesses living and working within the town. And, I am sure you also realize that at the same time, it is a hugely significant historic and cultural resource that represents the very origins of our State. We do not want Virginia City, Nevada City and cultural historic sites like them to get lost in the myriad of conflicting goals, objectives, missions and funding quagmires managed by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The Helena AOH believes that MHC and its assets should remain within the Montana Department of Commerce where it’s role in historic and cultural preservation in places such as Virginia City and Nevada City is organizationally connected to those functions in the State that are intended to enhance Montana tourism, marketing and economic development. The Helena AOH believes the EQC should consider recommending legislation that expands the role of the Montana Heritage Commission to include some of the other significant historic cultural sites in Montana such as Bannack, Plenty Coups, Travelers’ Rest, Elkhorn, Granite and similar culturally historic sites.

The Helena AOH believes the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks should be allowed to do what it was created to do and does best—operate and manage resources in the State which pertain to fish, wildlife and the great outdoors. And, in contrast, the Helena AOH believes that the Montana Heritage Commission should be organizationally structured and funded to do what it was created to do and does best—operate, manage and preserve the cultural and historic resources in the State.

We want to continue and further develop our partnership with the Montana Heritage Commission in the preservation of the Meagher Cabin on Idaho St. and the celebration of the cultural contributions of Irish in Montana.

For more information about the Helena AOH and its activities in Virginia City contact Joe Calnan, Financial Secretary at 4016-202-0617.